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## The Role of Effective Interventions in Reducing Bullying in Public Schools

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### Abstract

*Bullying in schools has been a major concern in many countries worldwide; however, this issue has received limited attention in Pakistan. The noticeable decrease in the involvement of teachers and parents in schools has been one of the major reasons for increased bullying in schools in Pakistan. The increased prevalence of bullying has increased the need for effective anti-bullying interventions in schools in Pakistan. The main purpose of the study is to identify the role of effective anti-bullying interventions in reducing bullying in public schools in Pakistan. To conduct this study, the experimental design chosen for this study is the pretest-posttest control group design. In this design, two groups were chosen: experimental and control groups, which were students in grades 6, 7, and 8. The study's findings show that school-based anti-bullying interventions play a significant role in reducing bullying in public schools in Pakistan. There was a significant difference recorded between the students' pre-test and posttest responses. The findings of this study have significant practical implications for school-based anti-bullying interventions and contribute significantly to the existing literature on bullying in schools in Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** Bullying, School-Based Interventions, Anti-Bullying Interventions, Reporting, Teacher Responsiveness.

### Introduction

Bullying is known to be one of the major social problems; one in every three individuals has been bullied physically, mentally or verbally. Bullying significantly influences the victim's as well as the perpetrators well-being sometimes leading to unprecedented and unmanageable long-term effects. Wolke & Lereya, (2015); Smith, (2016); Rettew & Pawlowski, (2016) evaluated that bullying can also be defined as an unwanted and aggressive behaviour that involves a perceived or real power imbalance. Shamsi and Ashraf, (2019) reported that bullying is one of the serious problem and rapidly emerging problems in schools leading to serious mental and

physical problems in victimized children. Bullying in schools has been a major concerning issue in many countries of the world, but this issue receives very limited attention in Pakistan. The noticeable decrease in parental involvement in school has been one of the major reasons for increased bullying in the schools of Pakistan. Numerous reasons have been identified as the root cause of increased bullying in Pakistani schools, such as race, socioeconomic status, appearance, disabilities and gender (Ahmad et al.,2020)

Bullying in Pakistan is a major issue in educational institutes and has rapidly increased in the last few years. Shujja and Atta, (2014) investigated the prevalence of bullying, violence and victimization in schools in Pakistan. The study results showed that the sixth grade students in private and public schools were at extreme risk of bullying. Shah, (2014) argued that physical and verbal bullying is occurring everywhere in the schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, especially in the absence of teachers. The most common places in the school where bullying occurs are washrooms, the canteen and school buses. The author further stated that children that are mostly bullied in schools are slow learners, disabled and loose- tempered students. Shah, (2014) further evaluated that the victims of bullying usually run away from the schools or change their routes to and from the schools.

Winnaar. et al., (2018); Vermote, (2020) stated that the school environment is one of the most important aspects of student growth and development as they spend most of their time in schools. Students with strong teacher support tend to be more engaged and happier and have fewer behavioural problems. Whereas, those students their teachers do not support feel left out and have multiple behavioural issues. Therefore, teachers are crucial in enhancing students' performance and reducing school bullying. However, Buthelezi & Kyobe, (2021) argued that due to the lack of awareness about bullying and effective interventions, the teacher's role is observed to be very minimal in reducing bullying in schools. Likewise, a one yearlong study conducted in five public and private schools in Karachi, Pakistan. Pre-piloted structured questionnaires were provided to the teachers through stratified random sampling. The authors concluded that more than half of the teachers in school were lacking in their knowledge about bullying in school children. This study presents a gap in teachers' awareness about bullying and the lack of their role in reducing bullying in schools.

To deal with the growing problem of bullying, various interventions have been conducted in the private and public schools of Pakistan. For instance, in the public school of Hyderabad, Pakistan, the right-to-play intervention was implemented that includes different student encouragement and awareness exercise. Similarly, there are many small awareness initiatives taken by the school administration, such as seminars, workshops class activities. However, these activities are said to be more prevalent in private schools than in public (Gaffney, Farrington, & Ttofi, 2019). In Pakistan, various social and child protection groups are working on creating

awareness about bullying, but due to the lack of teacher's knowledge and interest, these intervention does not provide the desired results (De Luca, Nocentini, & Menesini, 2019; Malahat et al., 2021).

## Methodology

### Research Design:

The research design selected for this study was pretest-posttest control group experimental design in which the subjects were randomly selected in two comparison groups, experimental and control. This experimental design presented the basic structure for a randomized control trial and provided has strong structure of comparison of two groups in this study. The experimental group was studied in both the phases of experiment pretest and posttest between which various anti-bullying interventions were provided. While, the control group was also tested in both the pretest and posttest phases, but no anti-bullying interventions were provided in between. The interventions applied in this study were developed through the systems approach to child protection. According to the system approach, rather than treating each child or problems individually it is more effective to work on improving the system and environment around the children. Thus, the intervention in this study were based on three phase's i.e. General meet and great, Discussion with principals and teachers, Awareness session with students.

### Sample Selection and Technique:

The sampling technique used in this study was a simple random selection in which the students were randomly selected for the experimental and control groups. The sample of this research is the students of 6, 7 and 8 classes from the public school of Islamabad. First, a general survey was conducted to evaluate the prevalence of bullying in each class, after which the most prevalent sample was taken for the study. As, Riani et al., (2020) in their studies argued that students of age 6-12 and 6th grade are mostly at high risk of bullying in schools. The following inclusion and Exclusion criteria was used:

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Students of 6, 7 and 8 grades from the public school in Islamabad	Students who are taking psychotherapy sessions for Bullying or any other psycho-social issues
Students who are currently enrolled and are regular to school	Students with any comorbidity
Students who have been in the same school for the past three years	

## Results

The data collected through the Child Adolescents Bullying Scale (CABS), which was developed by Strout et al., (2018) and has 20 items. Paired t test and independent t tests was used to compare the mean of pretest and posttest responses to identify the difference between the bullying behaviours after and before the intervention. The

results of the study showed that different types of bullying (See Table 2) are highly prevalent in the public school of Islamabad and the anti-bullying interventions can play a significant role in reducing the prevalence of bullying in the public schools.

Table 2 Common Types of Bullying identified in the public school of Islamabad

The most common type of bullying in girls	
<b>Teasing</b>	The most common type of bullying reported by girls in the survey was teasing that involve acts such as body shaming, taunts and taking or damaging each other stuff.
<b>Threatening</b>	Threatening was also identified as a common type of bullying among the girls that involves acts such as hurting and giving threats to each other.
<b>Spreading fake news</b>	Spreading fake news was another common type of bullying identified among the public school girls that involves behaviors such as spreading false news about fellow students in class or to their friends.
<b>Ignoring/criticizing on purpose</b>	Ignoring each other on purpose especially in the class and play time or criticizing each other in front of the whole class was another common form of bullying identified among the public school girls.

#### Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
				Lower	Upper		
Pretest - Posttest	-28.766	12.75413	2.32857	-33.52914	-24.00420	12.354	.000
	67						

Table 3 Paired Sample t-Test for pretest-posttest comparison

Table 3 shows the paired t-test statistics for the pretest and posttest responses from students of public schools of Islamabad. The output of the table presents that the mean of the Pretest is 44.366 and for Posttest is 73.1333, and the average difference between the pair 1 (pretest-posttest) score is -12.354. Similarly, the p-value presented in the table is - 0.014, which is less than a standard sig value of 0.05, and the negative values show that the pretest score is less than the posttest test score. Thus, it can be concluded that posttest scores are significantly better than the pretest

scores showing a significant difference in the bullying behaviour after and before the intervention.

Table 4 Independent t-test group statistics

Groups		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	Control group	30	62.7000	15.64509
	Experimental group			
	Control group	30	44.3667	8.89976
Posttest		30	62.0333	16.31053
	Experimental group	30	73.1333	6.00421

Table 4 presents the group statistics of the control and experimental groups of this study. The mean of the control group in the pre-post analysis does not present any significant difference (62.70-62.03). Whereas, the mean of the experimental group in the pre and posttest analysis shows a significant difference (44.37-73.13).

#### Protocols used for Pre and Post-experimental design

On protocol or Completer analysis: In this research study, on-protocol and completer analysis were conducted as all the subjects included in the subject completed the treatment by participating in all the different activities.

Protocol for controlling inter-subject difference: In the above study, the data was collected from the female students of public schools in Islamabad due to their homogenous characteristics, such as the same learning environment and school conditions. This helped the researcher to manage the confounding variables and maintain the reliability and validity of the data.

#### Discussion

The results of the study show that anti-bullying intervention plays a significant role in reducing bullying in public schools of Pakistan. The female students of public school in Islamabad were provided with different intervention with the aim to increase awareness about bullying as well as identify the student perspective on bullying. Different studies from the literature evaluated that these school-based anti-bullying interventions play a crucial role in preventing bullying experiences among students (Smith, 2016; Gaffney, Farrington, & Ttofi, 2019). These students were provided with sessions that includes in the school and class-room based anti-bullying interventions with a purpose to enhance the student's interpersonal and emotional skills. These classroom activities performed with students during school-based interventions play a very crucial role in enhancing their awareness regarding bullying behaviours (Nocentini, Palladino, & Menesini, 2019).

One of the major elements of the anti-bullying intervention provided in this study was to increase the rate of reporting bullying incidents in the school. As, under-reporting of bullying cases is considered to be a serious concern as a lower rate of reporting leads to a higher rate of bullying and victimization (Kennedy, 2021). In this study, previously, it was identified that there was a very limited reporting of bullying incidents; for instance, 3-4 students reported to the teachers once in three to four months. One of the main reasons for this was the fear of increased bullying and little or no response from the teachers. Through this intervention, strong emphasis was placed on the reporting of bullying incidents. Students were educated about the benefits of reporting and the role it plays in reducing bullying. After which, from the follow-up, it was identified that students had started reporting the incidents; around 3-4 students reported to the teachers about verbal bullying they were facing from their friends within a few weeks. Studies from previous literature showed that one of the main reasons for the thriving bullying incidence in school is the incidence not being reported. The schools where the bullying victims, as well as bystanders, consistently report the bullying incidents can see a considerable reduction in the frequency of bullying cases (Mahmoudi, & Keashly, 2020).

However, the analysis conducted, and the discussion sessions with teachers and staff of the school showed that there was no significant increase in the teacher's responsiveness towards bullying even after the intervention. Although, upon the follow-up discussion with the teacher, various reasons were identified for the lack of teacher responsiveness. Such as the teachers believe that their involvement in such cases may lead to further conflict. Similarly, the teachers were not really unaware of the bullying behaviour as well as were willing to respond but were still hesitant to intervene in these issues. Furthermore, in the study, a detailed discussion was conducted with class teachers and subject teachers to identify the prevalence and reporting level of bullying. The class teacher of grade 8 reported that bullying is a crucial subject that most Pakistani parents are not comfortable discussing, even though some are not ready to accept its existence. The teacher further reported that if they talk to parents whose children are being bullied, the teachers are subjected to humiliation. The teacher from the public school further reported that bullying is more common among youngsters or middle school children, and one of the most common signs is students going quiet and being reluctant to socialize with other students. The only go-to strategy these teachers have is to talk to these students who may not open up easily. Similarly, the teacher reported that the only strategy they can use is to warn these students to avoid such behaviour or give them indirect messages during the classes.

### **Conclusion**

The main purpose of this study was to identify the role of effective anti-bullying intervention in reducing bullying in public schools in Pakistan. The study was conducted through and pretest-posttest experimental design with 30 students of

public schools in Islamabad from grades 7 and 8. In the experimental design, students were provided with a bullying scale on which they recorded their responses. After that, a detailed anti-bullying intervention was conducted with the students that included different stages, such as awareness and discussion with teachers and the principal. There was a significant difference recorded between the pretest and posttest responses which showed that the anti-bullying intervention is an effective way of reducing bullying in schools. The results generated from the experimental study showed that there is a high prevalence of bullying in the public school of Islamabad, which is aligned with the literature findings, which show that school bullying has become one of the major problems in the contemporary educational world. The results of the experimental study further showed the important role of teachers and school administration in reducing bullying in schools and ensuring the effective implementation of anti-bullying interventions and policies. As, one of the main reasons identified for the increase in bullying during the sessions was the lack of teacher responsiveness on this issue.

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